



Thoroughly modern retro

ROGERS FIRST INTRODUCED THE E20A IN THE 1990s, BUT IT CEASED PRODUCTION WHEN THE UK FACTORY WAS CLOSED. NOW IT'S BEEN REVISED AND REFRESHED, CHRIS FRANKLAND CHECKS OUT WHAT THE MKII VERSION HAS TO OFFER

I thought I had been involved in the hi-fi industry a long time – but when I started out, legendary British brand Rogers had already clocked up almost 30 years. While that history is important and part of what Rogers is and represents, it has entered a whole new phase of its life now and the latest, revised E20a/ii integrated valve amplifier is a thoroughly modern product, originally conceived in the late 1990s, and not just a cynical reworking of an old design to trade on its nostalgia value.

So let's have a quick romp through the history of Rogers for those who don't know it. The company was originally founded by Jim Rogers in 1947, producing a range of thermionic valve equipment, including several amplifiers. In the Sixties and Seventies, it went on to produce some good-sounding transistor amps and tuners. It was in 1970 that it produced the LS3/6 studio monitor, followed four years later by the product it is arguably best known for, the BBC-licensed LS3/5A compact studio monitor. It continued to produce studio monitors for the BBC with the LS5/9 in 1983 and then the active LS5/8 using QUAD 405 amplifiers.

Rogers produced a number of valve amps in the Fifties and Sixties, such as the Cadet, HG88 and Ravensbrook, before Rogers Developments Ltd went into receivership in 1975 and was bought by retailer Michael O'Brien, who set up Swisstone Electronics, trading under the name Rogers.

Then, in 1993, O'Brien sold Swisstone Electronics and the Rogers brand name to current owners, Wo Kee Hong in Hong Kong. In the late Nineties, the financial crisis in Asia forced the closure of the UK factory and Wo Kee Hong focused on the Chinese market with a range of mainstream audio products.

It wasn't until late in 2010 that Rogers started to once again manufacture the LS5/9 and LS3/5A BBC monitor speakers in the UK, under the guidance of technical director Andy Whittle, and the E20a/ii I am reviewing here goes back to the early 1990s, when Andy Whittle worked with Peter Qvortrup at Audio Note to produce a valve amplifier capable of driving the LS3/5A. Hence the original E20a was born, along with a more powerful E40a. But of course all of that development and production ground to a halt when Wo Kee Hong closed the UK factory.

But Whittle went back to Audio Note in 2019 and asked them to update the circuit, improve the sound and restyle the box. The amp you see here is the result, and I am told there will also be a new two-box E40a/ii [PSU in one box, valves/output transformers in the other] coming out later this year, as well as a reimagined Cadet, again developed with help from Audio Note. That will be a parallel single-ended design using PCL86 valves.

So let's get down to cases. Here we have the E20a/ii: retailing at £3,999, this updated design also uses four 6L6 output tubes in push-pull configuration, still operating in pure Class A and pumping out 18W into 8ohms.